

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1- 18 (Cancelled)

19-25 (Withdrawn)

26. (Currently amended) A sludge digester comprising:

a vessel that has a shell with bottom section with sloped sides, a top section, and a middle section;

an upper draft tube that has a lower end that opens into the shell and an upper end that opens into the top section;

a distinct lower draft tube that has an upper end that opens into the shell, beneath the lower end of the upper draft tube, and a lower end that opens into the lower section; and

means for pumping liquid through ~~each of the draft tubes~~ the upper draft tube; and separate, independent means for pumping liquid through the lower draft tube.

27. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the vessel comprises more than two draft tubes.

28. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which jet pumps are provided as the means for pumping liquid through the draft tubes.

29. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the middle section is bounded by cylindrical walls.

30. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the top section slopes inwardly from the middle section.

31. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the vessel is generally egg-shaped.

32. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the means for pumping liquid through one of the draft tubes comprises means for pumping liquidly downwardly through that draft tube.

33. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the means for pumping liquid through the draft tubes comprise means for pumping liquidly downwardly through the upper draft tube and upwardly through the lower draft tube.

34. (New) A sludge digester as recited in claim 26, in which the means for pumping liquid through the draft tubes comprise means for simultaneously pumping liquid downwards through at least one of the draft tubes and upwards through another of the draft tubes.

35. (New) An anaerobic sludge digester comprising:

a vessel for containing a volume of liquid, the vessel having a shell with a bottom section with sloped sides, a top section, and a relatively wide middle section;

an upper draft tube that has upper end in the shell, a lower end in the relatively wide middle section, and an inlet and an outlet at those ends;

a lower draft tube that has an upper end in the relatively wide middle section, beneath the lower end of the upper draft tube, a lower end in the shell, and an inlet and an outlet at those ends; and

means for pumping liquid through one of the draft tubes and separate, independently operable means for pumping liquid through the other of the draft tubes.

36. (New) An anaerobic sludge digester comprising:

a vessel for a volume of liquid, the vessel having a shell with a top section, a relatively wide middle section, and a bottom section with sloped sides;

an upper draft tube with a lower end in the relatively wide middle section;

a lower draft tube with a upper end in the relatively wide middle section; and

means for pumping liquid downwards through the upper draft tube to the relatively wide middle section.

37. (New) An anaerobic sludge digester as recited in claim 36, in which:

an upper end of the lower draft tube is directly below the lower end of the upper draft tube, and the digester comprises means for pumping liquid upwardly through the lower draft tube as liquid is being pumped downwardly through the upper draft tube.

38. (New) An anaerobic sludge digester as recited in claim 35, and further comprising an external liquid recirculation system.

39. (New) An anaerobic sludge digester comprising:

a vessel for containing a volume of liquid, the vessel having a shell with a top section, a middle section, and a bottom section with sloped sides;

an upper draft tube with an upper end in the top section;

a lower draft tube with a lower end in the bottom section;

a middle draft tube with an upper end directly beneath the upper end of the upper draft tube; and

means for pumping liquid in one of the drafts tubes in one direction, and for simultaneously pumping liquid in another of the draft tubes in an opposed direction.